

### Abstract of the Disclosure

In a first embodiment of the invention, a method of providing a visual message waiting indicator signal to an off-hook telephone includes the step of receiving a voicemail message at a central location, and also includes the step of sending a visual message waiting indicator signal from the central location and destined for the off-hook telephone. In an alternative embodiment, a method of receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal in an off-hook telephone includes the steps of being in an off-hook condition, and receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal. This method may further include the step of displaying a visual message waiting indicator based on the received visual message waiting indicator signal. This method may also include the step of receiving an alert signal, and the step of transmitting an acknowledgement signal in response to the alert signal. In another alternative embodiment, a telephone includes a visual message waiting indicator, and an interface unit adapted to couple the telephone to a network, such that the telephone is in an off-hook condition when coupled to the network and engaged in a communication activity, and is in an on-hook condition when coupled to the network and not engaged in a communication activity, wherein the interface unit is adapted to receive a visual message waiting indicator signal when in the off-hook condition. In yet another alternative embodiment, a telephone switch includes a message storage unit adapted to receive a voicemail message associated with a telephone when the telephone is in an off-hook condition, and a visual message waiting indicator signal transmission unit adapted to transmit a visual message waiting indicator signal to the telephone in the off-hook condition.